

Portion Sizes and School-Age Children

Raising a Healthy Eater

Children as young as five years of age eat more food when offered larger portion sizes than when offered "normal" portion sizes. It is important for parents and care givers to guide young children into healthful eating habits. Simple mealtime strategies can help kids avoid the temptation to overeat.

Encourage portion-wise table manners¹

- Be a role model for your child. Make sure your own portions aren't too hefty.
- Resign from the "clean plate" club. Allow children to stop eating when they are no longer hungry.
- Allow children to serve themselves whenever possible.
- Encourage small "first portions," reassuring children that they can have "seconds" if still hungry.
- Encourage children to eat slowly and take "small bites."
- Package snack items in individual servings.

Dodge dining-out downfalls¹

- Prepare and eat more meals at home. Limit eating out to one or two times a week
- Avoid all-you-can-eat buffets, supersized meals and other "deals" that promote overeating.
- Keep fast-food orders to "regular" or "small" unless you plan to share.
- Have a healthy dessert like low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt if still hungry.
- Downsize take-out and snack-food purchases.
- Go family-style. Buy just one or two entrees to be shared. Round out meals with extra vegetables and salads.

Opt for learning opportunities¹

- Take time during shopping trips to teach children how to interpret food labels.
- Insist that snacks be eaten from a small plate or bowl, NOT the original box, bag or carton.
- Encourage family members to use the Food Guide Pyramid and visual cues to guide their choices.
- Help children learn what a serving looks like. Measure foods occasionally and discuss that a portion and a serving can be different.

Benefits of selecting sensible portion sizes²

- Helps children achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Provides more variety to the diet.
- Reduces total fat, sugar and calories.
- Encourages a reasonable intake of food in a society that often overeats.
- Results in less being eaten at meals and for snacks.
- Creates an awareness of the importance of the amount of food relative to calories consumed.

¹Nutrition and Your Child, No.4, 2001

²Rutgers Cooperative Extension